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ABSTRACT

Increased migration to rural communities by urbanites has focused greater attention on the role of the rural community college as the focal point of community activity and the major source of significant leadership and direction in community development efforts. Through its community service programs, the community college can contribute to community development in a manner that is well-planned and compatible with community goals and aspirations. This involves assessment of community needs through awareness of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the population and through continuing contact with businesses, industries, government organizations and agencies, churches and civic service organizations within the community. An active community service program involves many challenges for the rural community college, including: (1) scheduling appropriate instruction and experiences, especially those which contribute to the leadership skills of community members, during hours and at locations convenient to various segments of the population; (2) publicizing programs through non-traditional methods; (3) breaking down attitudinal and psychological barriers that hinder community participation; (4) procuring accessible and adequate facilities; (5) obtaining qualified part-time instructors; and (6) developing alternative delivery techniques to expand access to instruction. (LS)

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COMMUNITY SERVICES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PRESENTATION TO THE FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RURAL/SMALL COLLEGES

BY

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BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

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COMMUNITY SERVICES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The conduct of community services is an avowed commitment for most small/rural community colleges. Indeed, such activities are usually mandated by enacting legislation and are inherent in most colleges' statements of philosophy and purpose. Often, under the rubrics of "Community Services," "Continuing Education," or "Community Based Education," college catalogs describe courses and programs offered "in order to fulfill the ever-increasing educational needs of the community," or "to enable the adults in the region to continue their learning experience" (J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College Catalog, 1978). At least one community college has stated that "Community is our middle name."

Such pronouncements, while earnestly made, have often been more verbiage than action, but there has, in recent years, been an increased effort to put the ideal into practice. And it is well that this is so! Today, there are concerns and problems which virtually cry for attention and solutions.

Rural America is faced with many challenges, many of them resulting from increased migration into rural communities by commuters, and the departure of young residents to more urban areas. A compounding factor is that there is usually a shortage of trained leadership to deal with the challenges.

A popular phrase in vogue in society is, "Back to Nature." Thousands of persons throughout the United States are forsaking the hustle and bustle, and crowdedness of urban living for the more placid environs of "the country." Countless others desire to follow suit. We see evidence of this almost daily. Our urban windows are filled with green plants. "We check product labels for 'natural' ingredients, (and) we buy herbal shampoo for our hair and earth shoes for our feet" ("The American Farm," 1978). "Back to Nature" suggests relief for hurried urbanities, but it represents great concerns for citizens and leaders

of many of the nation's rural communities.

The term, "Community Services," has been defined in many ways (some have suggested that it is a most misunderstood, ill-defined, and over-worked phrase), but a definition offered by Myran is one which appears to be totally appropriate:

> "those action programs of the community college undertaken independently or in cooperation with other community groups and agencies, which direct the educational resources of the college toward serving individual, group, and community needs" (Myran, 1971)

It is this concept of community services which encourage community college involvement in activities which foster rural development and expand the effectiveness of community resources.

RURAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In increasing numbers, rural communities are facing an influx of persons purchasing homesites and homes within their boundaries. These persons are usually middle aged, have children, and despite their new places of residence, much of their economic and social orientation remains toward the cities. They retain their urban employment; they seek entertainment in the restaurants, theaters, and arenas of the city; and they shop at the modern suburban malls. They sleep in the rural communities, and use their services--schools and police and fire protection, for instance. They demand the initiation of new services-water and sewerage systems, refuse collection-and the improvement of existing ones.

Many long-term residents view the population increase as a threat to tradition and preferred lifestyles. Their fears are often correct, for increased population usually precipitates change. The native inhabitants resent growth and resist development efforts, but in most instances, their

attempts fail. Growth comes; and it is incumbent that the impending development be planned and orderly.

Few rural communities have the leadership (professional or lay) necessary to plan, prepare, and provide for orderly community development. It is imperative, therefore, that human development be a priority. Governmental officials need social and technical training, volunteer community leaders need instruction in effective participation, and all inhabitants of the community need an understanding of the effects development would have on their lives. Community colleges could play significant roles in such endeavors. Faculty and staff members could provide much needed expertise and assistance, college facilities could serve as extensions to community resources, college influence and prestige could enhance citizen support and attract expert consultants, and, as educational institutions, colleges might be able to procure funded grants.

The importance of leadership development cannot be overemphasized. It is a concern of considerable priority. So much so, in fact, that the United States Department of Agriculture annually sponsors a National Rural Development Leaders' School. The intensive week-long program is designed to train individuals to be leaders within their communities and to provide assistance in developmental efforts.

A second indication of the importance of the matter is the fact that the key concern expressed during a series of regional workshops on Rural Community Problems was the lack of sufficient leadership to deal with rural development and growth. The workshops were conducted by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Commerce and attended by county and town administrators, planners, and boards of supervisors and town council members.

There have been many studies which have indicated that communities which have knowledgeable leadership and informed, active citizen participation,

experience the most successful and orderly development.

As community development effects progress, community colleges could be valuable factors in attracting new businesses and industries, thus broadening the areas' tax base. Residents' concerns that development further increase population would be well-founded, but it would also provide better employment opportunities for people who already live in the community. Community colleges encourage industry to locate in their communities by providing educational opportunities and preparing a trained labor force. In doing so they tend to cause young adults to remain in the area. A cumulative effect results. Residents engage in better paying occupations; buying power increases; homes are purchased; jobs for carpenters, electricians and plumbers become more plentiful; and higher tax revenues are generated, providing better schools, hospitals, and services.

In most rural communities in which community colleges are located, the institutions are often the area's educational and cultural centers. They are usually considered to be the insitutions which are the most responsive to community needs, and are looked upon as being able to provide needed leadership and assistance. Many observers view this as being the colleges' major mission. Pifer, in fact, at the 54th annual convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, in 1973, suggested that community services be the primary concern (Myran, 1974). Others have indicated that the institutions should serve as catalysts in the provision of services to meet the many needs of communities. The community college position may have been stated best by Phillips:

> "One of the problems that we rural institutions have is that we are the only agency which has the expertise and the desire to do the many needed and worthwhile things that would be done by one of

many agencies in a city. We are just about the only source that the towns and cities have" (Phillips, 1975).

If Phillips' contention is true, and there are many instances in which it is, then a great and serious challenge has been placed before the colleges which serve rural communities. Being the only source of assistance, they must make certain that they do, indeed, have "the expertise and the desire to do the many worthwhile and needed things."

COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

The most successful community service programs are conducted by those who have a thorough awareness of the people in the region and who are, themselves, active members of the community. Most rural communities are quite complex (often encompassing urban and suburban, as well as rural influences) and are populated by a heterogenous citizenry. A firm understanding and knowledge of the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic composition of the population is mandatory. Familiarity with the region and its citizens can most effectively be obtained through personal contacts. The same holds true in the conduct of successful programs and activities. More significant results can be garnered through active participation in community events. A true dedication to working with the community and being involved in its affairs is a vital commitment which must be made by those engaged in community service efforts.

The concept which many persons have formed concerning community services, that is, that they consist only of hobby or recreation objectives, is not supported by the facts (Nickens, 1976). Community services encompass many areas: public use of the college library; presentation of cultural and dramatic productions; sponsoship of public forums and debates; conduct of surveys and assessments; scheduling of classes, seminars, and workshops;

community utilization of college resources and facilities; and sharing of faculty and staff knowledge and expertise; among other elements. Many are vital services which would otherwise be unavailable to communities and citizens.

Services do not have to be of great magnitude to be of considerable significance. The simple act of extending the sue of audio/visual equipment to volunteer fire and rescue squads could constitute a very beneficial community service, as could arranging instruction in fire and rescue tactics. Serving on committees to investigate commercial development possibilities or to increase recreation facilities requires little time and effort but could determine the success or failure of such ventures. The key thing to remember is that there are many needs which can only be met, or be met best, by community colleges. Community services programs must be committed to identifying and satisfying those needs.

CHALLENGES FOR SMALL/RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

It would be erroneous to look upon the community college as the rectifier of all ills and problems. There are confining elements, restrictive policies, and inadequate resources which serve as limiting factors. And while the institutions may be "the only source that small towns and cities have," it is oftne difficult to get the necessary and desirable citizen participation and response. Factors involving assessment and promotion, accessibility, and implementation of community services present many challenges.

Assessing constituents' needs and interests involves more than merely conducting a general survey. The mass mailing of surveys represents a questionable method of assessment. Returns of such questionnaires are usually slight and seldom reflect more than hobby and leisure-time interests. More signigicant results are garnered from personal contacts with businesses,

industries, governmental organizations and agencies, churches, educational insitutions, and civic and service organizations. Telephone surveys have also been effective. To truly serve its purposes, an assessment effort should be a constant activity.

The acheduling of appropriate instruction and experiences is a direct benefit from effective assessment. Not only can the subject matter which should be offered be determined, but also, how it could most effectively be presented. "How" is equally as important as is "what." It may be determined, for instance, that a program in Fire Fighting Tactics would be of benefit to volunteer firemen. Threr would be little value in conducting the program in the same manner as one directed toward metropolitan firement. Rural firefighters have no need for learning tactics involved in fighting fires in high-rise buildings or those depending upon the near limitless supply of water from strategically located hydrants.

Informing citizens of the schedule of classes and activities, and promoting community service programs represent major challenges in rural communities. Few have daily newspapers, fewer have local broadcast facilities, and none have large population centers which allow for easy dissemination of information. Proper promotion requires a multifarious approach, including mass mailings to all residents, selective mailings to specific target groups, usage of bradcast media (public service announcements and news releases, as well as paid notices), personal contacts (visitations and talks) with local organizations and groups, strategically located posters and handbills, notices to parents of school students, fliers distributed with utility bills and bank statements, and inserts in church bulletins. There are, undoubtedly, other promotional techniques but the message should be clear: no approach should be overlooked and any approach should be attempted.

One measure which many community colleges have found to be of value in assessing needs and promoting activities is the formation and utilization of lay advisory committees. Such committees may be organized to offer assistance to the entire community service program, or may be involved with specific and individual segments. Membership is usually comprised of local community leaders and practitioners, and provides significant insight into what activities and programs should be offered and how they can most successfully be conducted. Many institutions have used advisory committees to good advantage.

Community colleges have experienced near phenomenal growth during the past decade, mainly because they have been made accessible to large numbers of people. Community service programs, by their very nature, must be available to all who want and need them. Accessibility, in this context, refers to the removal, to the greatest extent possible, of psychological, physical, and financial barriers which hinder, discourage, or prohibit participation in community services activities.

Many persons residing in rural areas have not had a great amount of formal education. Some of them have had undesirable experiences and limited success in prior educational situations and do not readily respond to subsequent education and training opportunities. A review of existing literature reveals that most persons engaged in community service activities conducted by community colleges represent the middle of the soci-economic strata, thus indicating that significant segments of poor, minority, and disadvantaged citizens are not participating. Many such individuals view educational institutions with distrust, or ignore them completely. They simply do not view themselves as "college material" and cannot believe that a college-sponsored activity can be of benefit to them.

Breaking down attitudinal and psychological barriers is an important step in making community services accessible to all citizens of a community. To be successful in the effort, colleges must become more flexible in their procedures. Rigid admission and registration policies, for instance, deter many citizens from participating in community service programs. It is difficult for some individuals to understand why various and sundry forms must be completed merely to enroll in a single course or activity. They have no conception of funding formulas which emphasize headcounts and credits -- nor, in most instances, do they care.

Numerous studies have supported theories that "adults in a rural area are indeed interested in learning activities; however, participating in formal credit programs is not that important to them" (McCannon, 1977). Other reports (Bruce, 1976, and Rippletoe and Killacky, 1976) substantiate the claim and noted that nearly two-thirds of the rural students surveyed preferred non-credit activities. Lessening the emphasis on credit and simplifying registration procedures, will contribute to increased citizen participation in community service programs.

Accessibility also involves other factors, specifically, scheduling classes and activities during hours and at locations convenient to various segments of the population.

Scheduling must give consideration to citizens' working hours, child care responsibilities, planting and harvesting periods, and religious and social activities. A properly conducted needs assessment should help insure that programs are conducted at the most advantageous times, as well as at the most accessible locations.

Most rural areas are sparsely populated with considerable distances between communities. Road conditions, foul weather, and lack of transportation make if difficult for many citizens to travel. This is an important factor because studies have indicated that distance effects enrollments. In presenting the contention that "enrollments of community colleges reveal a predominance of local students," Vineyard stated that "enrollments decline proportionally among students as far as 15 miles from a (community) college campus and become almost nonexistent at 50 miles" (Vineyard, 1978).

Procuring accessible and adequate facilities is a very difficult task. Some community facilities, such as schools, churches, and governmental and judicial buildings may serve well for the conduct of public forums; and high schools and vocational-technical centers may be excellent for classroom and laboratory instruction; but they, as are community college campuses, are most often situated in central locations considerably removed from many portions of the population.

The development of alternative delivery techniques may be the only method of effectively expanding access to instruction and training. One strategy might include the preparation of individualized (slide-tape, video tape, or programmed text) instructional packages which could be distributed throughout the region for home and personal use. If no public facilities exist in certain areas, arrangements could possibly be made with businesses or merchants for the storage and distribution of the packages and attending equipment. Instructional television programs offer another possibility, especially if there is a public station within the college's region.

Providing activities and programs to residents of even the most sparsely populated areas is necessary if the college's community service effort is to truly fulfill its mission. If their citizens are unable to come to the campus, the campus must be willing

to go to them. Such an attitude differentiates most community colleges from some other institutions and enhances their reputation of being responsive to needs.

A survey conducted within the Florida Community College System in 1976 (Nickens, 1976) revealed that 54.2% of the community service students questioned stated that their annual income exceeded $12,000. Fewer than one-fourth (23.2%) earned less than $7,500. Clearly, fees for community service activities in Florida, which must be 125% of costs, effect the enrollment of disadvantaged citizens. It is obvious that in order for individuals to have access to community service programs, the programs must be affordable.

The potential impact of the situation can be illustrated by considering a recent U.S. Department of Agriculture report which contained information that "half the farm families have incomes under $3,600 with some 14 million rural people existing below the declared poverty level" (Vinegard, 1978). If the theory that high tuition and registration fees discourage and prohibit the involvement of many persons in community service programs, small/rural colleges must consider measures to reduce costs to students.

It is easier to make such a statement than it is to implement it. Non-credit community service programs receive funding in very few states and most are offered on at least a self-sustaining basis, with students paying the costs of instruction. There appears to be few federal grants for community service programs in rural communities, nor student aid for most non-credit or part-time students. Funding for community services, then, must come from student fees, local funds, or private or foundation grants. Other measures could involve cooperative efforts with other agencies or educational institutions.

Most community service programs involve instruction or training of a specialized nature, or are conducted in response to a specific need or to satisfy a particular interest. They frequently vary greatly from the college's curricula courses and most often are conducted as non-credit offerings. The activities often can be presented

only by part-time instructors.

Contracting qualified part-time instructors constitutes a considerable challenge. Individuals possessing necessary or desired academic credentials or specific expertise are not always readily available in rural communities. It is often difficult to persuade competent individuals who live in urban or suburban areas to travel to the rural community, especially if it is remote or of some considerable distance, and it is occasionally impossible to pay salaries which would entice them to do so. The most workable solution is to develop an instructor pool of local residents and employers.

Instructors for non-credit activities are usually the easiest to obtain. They are contracted on the basis of their knowledge and expertise, not their academic credentials, so finding such individuals presents somewhat less a problem. Contracting instructors to teach credit bearing programs is more difficult. Such individuals must possess at least the minimum academic qualification established by the regional accrediting agency and should not be contracted unless he/she is potentially as valuable as is a full-time faculty member who might teach the same course.

Part-time instructors can be recruited in a variety of ways and from a number of sources. Some procedures which have been successful in providing many institutions (even small/rural colleges) with highly qualified, able instructors are:

Soliciting referrals from the college's faculty and administration

Notifying businesses, industries, and the professions (both local and those situated in nearby metropolitan areas) of instructional needs

"Word-of-mouth" advertising

Referrals from curriculum and community services advisory committees

Screening of full-time applicant files

Letters to local professional, civic, and service clubs

Advertisements in local and regional newspapers

Broadcast media announcements

Through printed brochures and pamphlets

Contacting local high schools and colleges

The extent and scope of a community service program is often predicated on the availability of competent instructors. It is imperative, therefore, that every possible effort be made to maintain as large a file of potential instructors as possible. Associates and acquaintances often possess greater qualifications than are commonly known. The smart community service administrator should be ever cognizant of existing and future needs and should scrutinize personal contacts for their potential as instructors.

SUMMARY

In many rural areas, the community college is the focal point of activity and the major source of significant leadership and direction. If its commitment to community service is strong, its members are active participants in the community with a continuous desire to be of service and to be responsive to needs.

One of the most significant services a community college can provide is to contribute to community development efforts. Such contributions should be well planned, based upon solid data, and compatible with community goals and aspirations.

Urban growth has profound effects upon rural development. That is a fact of life and it would be a mistake to think otherwise. No segment of Rural America is immune to it. It is important, therefore, that the inevitable and resultant changes in rural environment and life styles be well planned and anticipated. Community colleges can help insure that responses to growth are proactive, rather than reactive, by providing effective leadership and guidance. They usually have, or can obtain, the necessary personnel and resources.

Providing for effective leadership in rural development should be of considerable priority in any community service program and could be the means by which a community college has its most significant impact on a rural community.

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